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SIPDIS

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STATE FOR AF/SPG, PRM, AND ALSO PASS USAID/W
USAID FOR DCHA SUDAN TEAM AND AFR/SP
NAIROBI FOR USAID/DCHA, USAID/REDSO, USAID/SFO AND FAS
GENEVA FOR NKYLOH
NSC FOR PMARCHAM, MMAGAN, AND TSHORTLEY
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
USUN FOR TMALY
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SUBJECT: DARFUR - EL GENEINA'S NORTHERN CORRIDOR AT RISK

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: During a recent USAID visit to El Geneina, West Darfur, U.N. staff alerted USAID to serious security problems and human rights abuses in the northern corridor of West Darfur. Arab nomadic groups and armed militia are terrorizing the residents of Abu Sorug, Sirba, Silea, and Bir Dagig, and they are operating without any significant intervention by Sudanese government police. Bir Dagig is particularly vulnerable to attack due to the complete absence of police, and the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has issued a public call to the Government of National Unity (GNU) to protect residents of the village. End summary.

PATTERN OF ABUSE MOVING SOUTHWARD IN NORTHERN CORRIDOR

¶2. (SBU) On July 19, USAID staff met with the U.N. Mission in Sudan-Human Rights (UNMIS-HR) Team Leader in El Geneina to discuss events in the northern corridor connecting El Geneina to Kulbus. UNMIS-HR reported that this area, which includes the villages and internally displaced person (IDP) settlements of Jebel Moon, Sirba, Silea, Abu Sorug, and Bir Dagig, has experienced serious violence during the past two years. OHCHR reported that a brutal Arab militia attack on Aro Sharow IDP camp in Jebel Moon in September 2005 resulted in the deaths of 27 people and the burning of 40 homes; Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) soldiers stationed 2 km away did nothing to intervene. Three of the worst attacks took place in Jebel Moon, Sirba, and Silea in late 2006. On October 29, 2006, Arab militia attacked the villages and IDP camps around Jebel Moon, an area predominantly inhabited by the Jebel Messeriya ethnic group, killing 50 civilians. (Note: The Jebel Messeriya is an African group that is distinct from the Arab Misseriya group. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) The Sudanese government believes the population in this area supports the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), and UNMIS staff reported that subsequent investigation has shown SAF involvement in some attacks. On November 11, 2006, SAF and Arab militia attacked the village of Sirba, killing 11 civilians and destroying 100 homes. SAF and Arab militia allegedly deliberately targeted young and old men in the incident, reportedly in retaliation for a JEM attack on an SAF

convoy. On December 9, 2006, Arab militia attacked a civilian convoy traveling on the El Geneina-Silea road south of Sirba, killing 28 out of 50 civilians, many of whom were IDP teachers from Abu Sorug. The attackers set their victims on fire with the apparent intent of burning them alive. UNMIS-HR has also documented other smaller-scale human rights abuses in the area.

¶4. (SBU) UNMIS-HR believes the situation in the northern corridor has recently worsened. Human rights monitors are documenting increased attacks on the Erenga, an African ethnic group. The pattern of attacks appears to be moving south toward El Geneina, with more Erenga villages drawn into the conflict. UNMIS-HR said that previously the government did not consider the Erenga to be supportive of the armed opposition groups, but that government's perception seems to have changed. The GNU may be attempting to keep the Erenga from interacting with the Jebel Messiriya, as the JEM commander Abdul Magid, who is Jebel Messeriya, is active in Jebel Moon.

CONFLICT RAGING WITH IMPUNITY IN BIR DAGIG

¶5. (SBU) The villages and IDP settlements in the northern corridor are extremely vulnerable. In Abu Sorug, Silea, and Sirba, the police are very weak, and the African Union Mission in Sudan is not patrolling. According to UNMIS-HR, the residents have formed "local defense forces" to protect themselves from attack. Nomads reportedly cannot even enter the markets in these areas.

¶6. (SBU) Other U.N. staff told USAID that Central Reserve Police are targeting young men in the northern corridor. When UNMIS officers visit the villages, the youth beg to be taken out of the town for fear that they will be killed. U.N. staff also reported that people in these areas who have attempted to register cases of human rights abuses with police have been chased away from the police stations.

¶7. (SBU) The village of Bir Dagig, located 30 km north of El Geneina

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town, with a population of 4,500, is particularly vulnerable to attack. Village residents have been complaining that Arab nomads have harassed and abused residents, particularly women and girls, since January 2007. The GNU initially deployed additional police to the village, but in April 2007, all of the police withdrew from the town, according to UNMIS-HR. Whether the police withdrew due to fear of attack or to punish the residents is unclear.

¶8. (SBU) Since July 1, 2007, nomads and militia have accused villagers in Bir Dagig of stealing livestock. In retaliation, nomads and militia beat and abducted the residents and looted their property. Militia have encircled Bir Dagig. As there is no well in the village, women have to go outside to get water, at which time the militia rape and assault the women. On July 5, a government official traveled to Bir Dagig to mediate between the militia and residents. The Bir Dagig community members agreed, under threat of future militia attacks, to pay 30,000 Sudanese Pounds (USD 15,000) in compensation for the cattle. The militia members received no sanctions for their abuse of the villagers. Subsequent UNMIS-HR reports indicate that local government officials have agreed to mediate between the groups, redeploy police, and pursue registered complaints, but to date none of this has occurred.

----- UNITED NATIONS ISSUES PUBLIC CALL TO PROTECT CIVILIANS -----

¶9. (SBU) During a U.N. interagency mission to Bir Dagig on July 18, UNMIS-HR observed 15 to 20 armed men who had come to collect money from the villagers, and no police presence in the village. The villagers indicated that they did not have the money. The U.N. mission was advised to leave the area due to the tense situation, and withdrew.

¶10. (SBU) OHCHR subsequently issued a statement calling on the GNU to "act immediately on pledges it has made to re-establish a

permanent police presence in Bir Dagig and to provide effective protection to civilians living in the village and surrounding area."

OHCHR urged the government to "fulfill its responsibility and its stated commitment by 1) investigating complaints of livestock theft and human rights abuses, and 2) bringing to justice in fair trials perpetrators of human rights abuses in Bir Dagig." To date UNMIS-HR and OHCHR have reported no action on the part of the GNU in relation to the situation in Bir Dagig.

¶11. (SBU) Comment: USAID supports two groups of human rights lawyers in El Geneina who take on cases for the most vulnerable victims of human rights abuses. However, only registered cases can be prosecuted, and few have been registered in the northern corridor due to fear of retribution or police intimidation.

FERNANDEZ